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SUBJECT: ETHNIC POLITICS IN GUINEA - YOUTH OF THE FOREST
REGION

REF: A. CONAKRY 0600
[1](#)B. CONAKRY 0602
[1](#)C. CONAKRY 0607

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. This cable is the fourth in a series of reports exploring the role of ethnicity in Guinean politics (reftels). The youths of Guinea,s Forest Region appear to be primarily focused on minor inter-tribal tensions within their own region. Forest youth leaders downplayed broader ethnic tensions in Guinea, claiming that any tensions fall along regional divisions rather than ethnic divisions. However, references to Sekou Toure,s regime and stereotypes of the Peuhls and Malinkes suggest that ethnicity does play a role. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On October 15, Poloff met with Jacques Bonimy, the president of an organization called &Coordination of the Youth of the Forest Region.⁸ This group represents a multitude of ethnicities living in the Forest Region, and falls under the umbrella of the larger Council of Elders, which includes ethnic organizations from each of Guinea,s four natural regions. Bonimy is a university professor and a member of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), representing the opposition Union for Guinean Progress (UPG) party. (COMMENT. The UPG is led by Jean-Marie Dore with people from the Forest Region forming most of its political support. END COMMENT). Two members of the organization,s executive bureau also actively participated in the discussion.

FOR CIVIL DEFENSE

[1](#)3. (SBU) Bonimy said that the &Forest Youth⁸ organization was initially established in 2000 in response to conflict spillover from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone. According to Bonimy, rebel forces had crossed over into Guinea and some Guineans had joined these forces, which was contributing to inter-ethnic conflict in the region. Bonimy said the organization,s role is to facilitate communication and cooperation within the Forest Region, although it initially helped mobilize a civil defense against foreign aggression. After the wars were over, Bonimy said the Forest Youth stopped meeting regularly. &However, after the 2007 strikes, we relaunched our activities,⁸ he said.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Forest Youth,s executive bureau includes 16 members representing the seven prefectures of the Forest Region. The youth leaders could not estimate the organization,s total membership, although they said that most Forest-based youth organizations fall under their regional organization. Bonimy said that the Forest Youth meet once a month in Conakry. During the meetings, participants reportedly discuss ongoing conflict resolution issues between smaller Forest tribes, the need for national

peace and reconciliation, and ways to harmonize various activities. Bonimy said that the organization occasionally holds General Assemblies, which routinely attract more than 200 participants.

15. (SBU) When asked whether the organization discusses political issues, the youth leaders said that they discuss anything that impacts the Forest Region, which includes politics.⁸ As an example, Bonimy said that the Forest Region's poor infrastructure and deteriorating road system are frequent topics of discussion. In addition, Bonimy said that the Forest Youth are hoping to set up regular exchanges with current political leaders who are originally from the Forest Region.

GUINEA,S PROBLEM IS REGIONAL, NOT ETHNIC

16. (SBU) Poloff asked if the youth leaders think there is an ethnic problem in Guinea. Bonimy at first hesitated, thoughtful, and then said yes, there are some small ethnic problems.⁸ However, he clarified that he did not think Guinea has a national ethnic problem, but rather, sources of tension between the four natural regions, as well as tensions between small tribes within the Forest Region. Bonimy said that although the four regions are tied to ethnic bases, their populations are actually quite diverse because of extensive inter-marrying and migration. Furthermore, Bonimy said that the linkages are more lingual than truly ethnic. He pointed to Middle Guinea, which is predominantly Peuhl, as an example, saying that people of many different ethnic

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backgrounds are living in the region, but are united because they all speak Pular.

17. (SBU) While Bonimy said that ethnic tensions are not a significant problem, there is some degree of tension between the natural regions, and especially between Middle Guinea (Peuhl) and Upper Guinea (Malinke). He attributed these tensions to economic disparities, commenting that Upper Guinea is one of the poorest parts of the country while Middle Guinea is better off because it is a major commercial center.

BUT ETHNICITY PLAYS A ROLE

18. (SBU) One of Bonimy's colleagues said that the current tensions exist because everyone is fighting for power according to their individual interests. The Soussous still end up with most of the important positions,⁸ she said, and many Peuhls feel that it should be their turn since the Malinkes and the Soussous have already had their turn as president.⁸

19. (SBU) Bonimy referred to Sekou Toure's regime, pointing out that while many people were killed under Sekou Toure, Peuhls were targeted more than other ethnic groups. He said that some Peuhls blame the Malinkes for these deaths because Sekou Toure was Malinke. Bonimy added that groups like Haal Pular are actively perpetuating this sentiment, especially among the country's youth. At the same time, Bonimy said that the Malinkes perceive the Peuhls as being against them, and therefore, react accordingly. Exacerbating the problem, according to Bonimy, is the fact that the Peuhls are wealthier and there is some degree of jealousy.

110. (SBU) Using Conakry's main open air market, Marche Medina, as an example, Bonimy said that the market vendors are almost exclusively Peuhl or Malinke. Only about 1 in 100 vendors is from the Forest,⁸ he said. He noted that one section of the market is occupied predominantly by Peuhls, and the other section by Malinkes. Everyone knows that the

Malinkes sell the small motor parts and the Peuhls sell everything else,8 he said.

NEED TO COLLABORATE WITH OTHERS

¶11. (SBU) When asked about collaboration with the other ethnic youth organizations, Bonimy said that the Forest Group maintains contact with other youth leaders, but that the groups do not meet together often. &We need to get together more frequently,8 he told Poloff.

COMMENT

¶12. (SBU) The Forest Youth appear to be primarily focused on internal conflict issues, which have been a problem in the region for several years. Although Bonimy claimed that existing tensions are not exclusively ethnic in nature, his comments throughout the discussion suggest that ethnicity is a key concern. It is interesting to note that the Forest Youth is supposed to be an apolitical organization, but that its president is in fact a high level opposition party member serving on the CENI. END COMMENT.
RASPOLIC